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A D D R E S S
— OF THE —
Hon. ELIHU ROOT, Secretary of War

Delivered at a Meeting of the Union
League Club, held on the 6th day
of February, 1903, to Honor its 

FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY

ADDRESS

OF THE

HONORABLE ELIHU ROOT,

SECRETARY OF WAR,

DELIVERED AT A

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*Mr. President, Gentlemen of 1863,
and Gentlemen of the Club:*

It is worth while coming from Washington, or even California, or the Philippines, to receive such a welcome. I will speak to-night for the younger members of the Club. Having been a member but thirty-four years, I look up with reverence to these old gentlemen.

Length of life is little, but to have been a part of great affairs, to have done something in this world that will live, to have woven a thread into the fabric that is to last for ages—that is life—that is to have lived, though length of days be short; and that, old friends, you did. We are grateful to you and we honor you for the opportunity which you so nobly seized and upon which you built so well.

Happy men, the men of '61 to '65, to live to see the country they saved grow so great, not merely in material things, in manufactures, in railroads, in steamships, and in marble buildings, but so great in all that dignifies and ennobles humanity.

Happy men, to see the great war, which you helped so much to nerve our people to main-

tain for union and liberty, ended, and the spectacle of noblest manhood exhibited to the world by two sections that had fought so bitterly coming now together, with the kindness of true American citizenship, and again together upholding the flag that stands for the liberty of all ; to see the curse of slavery removed and the Declaration of Independence made true at last for all our people ; to see the reflex action of our institutions upon Europe gradually changing the structure of governments and lifting up across the sea the common people of all the countries of the world towards the dignity of manhood and their rightful participation in the fruits of the earth ; to see, what is true, that year by year coming out of the crucible of trial our public service has grown stronger, and purer, and better in its integrity and its devotion to public interests than ever before in all our history ; and to see our nation, grown so great and strong, still maintaining the principles of liberty and justice, and stretching out its hands over the weak people of the earth and saying to the oppressors, " Hold."

Happy men, to come out of that time of

doubt and trial and see all this. But the end is not yet. Your work was but little if you left none behind you to take it up. The old and trite saying, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty," holds a broader and a greater truth, "Eternal good citizenship is the price of good government." There yet remain and there will ever come in unending succession problems, difficulties, doubts, struggles, on which the safety of our institutions will depend. There are to-day problems almost immeasurable which hold within them the possibilities of evil for our country, calling for the best citizenship, the most devout patriotism, and the hardest fibre. Let me mention two or three.

One is the tendency—growing, I fear—to division between the rich and the poor, under which wealth tends constantly to undue control over legislation, and poverty to stir up a war of classes based upon envy and jealousy of the rich. The very results of our prosperity tend to increase this evil, and every good citizen should set his face against it and seek to make it certain that never in this free land shall we have a war of classes.

Another thing, which is fraught with the most fatal consequences, if it proceeds, is the tendency to check individual enterprise and development. Individual opportunity, the chance that every poor boy has to exercise the talents that God has given him and to rise as high as man can go by his brain, by his industry, by his persistency, and by his courage, is the very foundation of American liberty. Yet many of the labor organizations in this country are including in their rules provisions against the better man doing more work, earning more wages than the man less capable, and seeking to hold down industry, activity, and ambition to the level of sloth, of incompetency, of stupidity. I make no war against labor organizations; I believe in them. I believe that in the great struggle for a fair division of the increased wealth of mankind that comes from the enormous increase of the productive power of mankind through invention and discovery, the laborer is bound to organize and entitled to organize, and I am glad to see him organize and get his own. But we all must set our faces against the tendency to say to any American boy "You shan't do the best you can."

A third thing is one with which this Club may well be concerned. Our Chairman has referred to the march of the negro regiments down Broadway. Within two years after the foundation of this Club the nation, by the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, provided that slavery should not exist in the United States, or in any Territory under its jurisdiction. Within five years, by the Fourteenth Amendment, the nation declared that all men born or naturalized within the territory of the United States should be citizens. Within seven years, by the Fifteenth Amendment, the nation declared that no one should be deprived of his right to vote by reason of his race, color, or previous condition of servitude. Those three amendments embodied the scheme adopted by the thoughtful men of the time for the uplifting of those who had been held in slavery from the beginning of our history.

You remember how difficult the question was, What was to be done with the poor black man held all his life a slave and now free? The answer, found in these amendments, was, Give him citizenship, give him

suffrage, give him equal rights, and he will rise.

I fear we are compelled to face the conclusion that the experiment has failed. The suffrage has been taken away from the black man in most of the States where he composes a large part of the population. The black man of the South, in general, no longer has practically the right of suffrage. The right to aspire to office, however humble, is also disputed, and in a great measure denied.

A curious development has been seen within the past year along this line. President Roosevelt has appointed fewer black men in the South than did President McKinley. There are fewer black men now holding Federal offices in the South than there were when President McKinley died, yet loud outcries are to be heard from the greater part of the South against what is called President Roosevelt's policy of appointing black men to office, whereas under President McKinley, under President Harrison, under President Hayes—under all the preceding Presidents—nothing was said, although more black men were appointed.

A few nights ago a black man, holding an important office, attended an official reception at the White House. There has not been a time since the Civil War when black men have not held similar offices in the Federal Government. At official receptions, the black men holding those offices have always attended. They attended the receptions of Presidents McKinley, Cleveland and the others. Yet the attendance at President Roosevelt's was the signal for an outcry that the whites were being insulted by the appearance of this black officeholder. Now, I am not discussing the question. I am simply showing that the same state of official treatment of the blacks meets a change in the public feeling of the South; that the right to aspire to office under the Federal Government which was formerly unquestioned is now questioned. And it is probably but a matter of time—not so very long a time—when the overwhelming weight of opinion of the white men will succeed in excluding blacks from all offices in the southern States.

So the country has to face the failure of the plan which was adopted at the close of

the Civil War, to lift the blacks from the condition in which they were left when they were freed from slavery by conferring upon them the suffrage. We can never throw off the responsibility that rests on our people for the well-being of these men who were held in bondage for so many generations, and the new question of what can be done for them, now that the first attempt has failed, is one that challenges the best thought and the best patriotism of our country.

But let me say this: You did not live and labor in vain in this field. The spirit in which you wrought still lives. You have created a higher type and sense of patriotism; you have elevated the character of American citizenship; and there live to-day, largely through your efforts and the example and inspiration furnished by you and the men who labored with you in 1863, men enough in this land, devoted to their country, competent to meet the problems and perform the labors of good citizenship, to carry on the blessings that you saved from extinction to the remotest generation. And to that end, long live the Union League Club!

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Ms. A.

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